

doubtful about their oddity; so I took the precaution of registering the two packets at the Atlantic City postoffice next morning, and have carried the receipts in my purse ever since. Here they are."

Producing a small gold purse from an inner pocket, and thus revealing the purpose of a gold chain that hung round her neck, Mrs. Delamar took two tiny slips of paper from the purse, and held them forth. She seemed to wish to give them to the District Attorney; but he indicated that the Coroner should examine them first.

AS a matter of fact, Forbes had never received a greater setback from a witness. He was expecting a plausible story,—some feminine expedient that would seem to reconcile her suspicious movements with her subsequent silence,—but he certainly did not look for a candor that went far beyond the knowledge gleaned by the police. For the moment Steingall and Clancy shared the lawyer's embarrassment. Mrs. Delamar had taken the wind out of their sails so effectually that they even forgot to watch Waverton. They knew, better than the Coroner or anyone else, that she was probably speaking the truth, and, indeed, after a moment's scrutiny of the postoffice receipts, the Coroner said:

"These receipts bear out the witness' words. The addresses are those she has named, and they carry the date stamp of the Atlantic City postoffice."

A perceptible wave of interest ran through the court. Opinion was distinctly in Mrs. Delamar's favor. With few exceptions, nearly all present settled down comfortably to hear a thoroughly interesting bit of cross examination. They were not disappointed. Not often is a man chosen to represent the District Attorney because he happens to be somebody's nephew, and, although Forbes might carry no armament other than heavy artillery, there was metal in his broadsides.

"I am much obliged to you for the straightforward explanation you have given of events on the evening of the day that, by common consent, is fixed as the date of your husband's death, Mrs. Kyrle," he said, "and I want you to tell us now why you withheld these facts during the opening of the inquest a fortnight ago."

"That is a simple matter," and Mrs. Delamar smiled with a sad sweetness that reached many hearts. "In common with the rest of the world, I thought my husband died from natural causes, and I saw no reason why my unhappy domestic affairs should be published broadcast. Not until I heard the medical evidence in court today had I the slightest reason to believe that he had been poisoned."

She did not hesitate about using that ugly word "poisoned," and the mere sound of it warmed Forbes to his task.

"As you say," he commented dryly, "Mr. Kyrle was poisoned, and we have it on unquestionable authority that the agent was nicotine in its deadliest form. Now, Mrs. Kyrle, you have heard the statement made by José Vuilmo. Have you anything to tell us that may serve to clear up the point in dispute between him and—Mr. Claude G. Waverton?"

THE slight pause before Waverton's name was not lost on the one man whom it affected more than all others. "Is that question properly framed, Mr. Coroner?"

"Really, Sir, I must protest against these interruptions!" and Forbes bristled with indignation.

"You may protest as much as you like: I refuse to sit here and listen to your wilful twisting of facts!" said Waverton, and Clancy, brought back to the real significance of the drama being played before spectators unconscious of its quality, found himself regarding Waverton as a man fighting for his life against overwhelming odds.

"I don't quite see what ground you have for objecting to Mr. Forbes' words, Mr. Waverton," said the Coroner.

"Thank you," said the lawyer hastily; but Waverton would not allow him to continue Mrs. Delamar's examination as if the point were settled in his favor.

"Pardon me one instant," and Waverton's voice was singularly calm and dominant. "I have no wish whatever to interfere with the proceedings; but I must insist, with respect, that between José Vuilmo and me there is no dispute. He said that a man representing himself to be Claude G. Waverton bought crystals of nicotine at his shop; but he also stated that I was not the man in question."

The Coroner gazed mildly at Forbes. "Of course, there is a material difference—" he began hesitatingly; but the District Attorney saw that he had blundered, and made haste to rectify his error.

"Permit me to say, Sir," he cried, "that I may, perhaps, have chosen my words carelessly. Let me amend them. Now, Mrs. Kyrle, to pass on, can you throw any light on José Vuilmo's testimony? He told us that some person, representing himself to be Claude G. Waverton, purchased an ounce of crystals of nicotine on February 22. Do you know anything about the transaction?"

MRS. DELAMAR, in her turn, had been vouchsafed a breathing space. She had to elect instantly whether she would admit that the Mrs. Kyrle little known and seldom seen at Absecon was none other than the notorious Mrs. Delamar, or strive to retain the disguise that had protected her so effectually in the past. Yet had she really any choice in the matter? Had not these wretched detectives unearthed her past, and dared she risk the destruction of a credibility thus far established by denying a double existence so capable of incontestable proof? The lawyer had contrived to place the onus of decision on her shoulders; since he did not even appear to assume that she was the tenant of the house at Palm Beach. Her face blanched to a more sorrowful wanness; but she did not falter.

"Yes," she said, "it was I who lived in Asphodel House. Mr. Claude G. Waverton was my guest during March and April, and I sent him to buy the crystals of nicotine. I am at a loss to understand why he should deny the fact, or why José Vuilmo should withdraw his first emphatic recognition of Mr. Waverton. I am quite aware that Mr. Waverton is suffering from the effects of an accident; but—"

"Let us keep to the thread of the story," said Forbes hastily. "You have been remarkably candid—"

Traherne thought he saw an opportunity, and took it. Up he bounced. "The District Attorney asked my client—I quote his very words—if she could throw light on José Vuilmo's testimony. I think she ought to be allowed to state her impressions fully."

"Impressions are not evidence," growled Forbes. "Exactly; but why take one part of my client's views and reject another?"

"Very well," snapped Forbes; though his rival fancied that this alacrity to yield the point suggested a trap. "What were you about to say, Mrs. Kyrle?"

"Only this," was the meek response. "If Mr. Waverton's memory is affected, he cannot be positive that it was not he who went to Vuilmo's store. Moreover, Vuilmo did not recognize him, and I am quite sure he executed my commission."

Certainly, here was a hard nut for Waverton to crack. The woman's words carried conviction. Clancy hugged himself silently; Steingall, deprived of a cigar, chewed a penholder, and his big, prominent blue eyes passed rapidly from Mrs. Delamar to Waverton, and from Waverton to Mrs. Delamar. Both he and Clancy noted that the man and woman exchanged a steady, contemplative look as Forbes bent over his papers. There was neither hostility nor veiled intent in that silent interplay of glances; but rather curiosity, inquisition, an acknowledgment of something new and strange in their relations, whereby the man was troubled and the woman almost bewildered.

NOW, before we go any further in this matter of the purchase of a poison, Mrs. Kyrle, I must introduce a somewhat distressing element into the inquiry," said Forbes, pouncing suddenly on the witness as if he were a hawk striking at a pigeon. "Your name is Josephine Kyrle; but you are, I take it, known to a very much wider circle of people as Josephine Delamar?"

"Yes," said the witness faintly, with just a hint of a sob in her voice.

Some shrewd wits among the uninformed listeners present in court were already alive to the imminence of this astonishing disclosure; but to the multitude it came with sledgehammer force and more than sledgehammer directness. Mrs. Kyrle the fascinating and dangerous Mrs. Delamar—the wicked heroine of the Waverton divorce case—the woman whose name truth, which is often a synonym for scandal, had linked with so many bizarre incidents in the smart society of Florida and New York? Well, wonders would never cease! The descriptive reporter wrote, "At this statement, every ear was agog, and every eye in court was turned on the beautiful woman on the witness stand; while she herself, shrinking under this avalanche of scrutiny, was almost moved to tears."

At any rate, the cat was out of the bag from that instant, and the attention of every daily newspaper in the country was focused on a trivial inquest in lively and pleasure-seeking Atlantic City.

"In fact," went on the dry legal voice mercilessly, "a little while prior to your husband's death you had figured as correspondent in a suit for divorce brought by Mrs. Waverton against her husband, Claude G. Waverton?"

"Yes," and the response was even more muffled, though distinct enough.

Traherne moved uneasily. He was unable to gage the issues lying behind these revelations; but he noticed that Forbes appeared to expect him to intervene, so he kept still.

"I believe too," said Forbes, after waiting for the interruption that came not, "that you have been, and still are, on terms of close friendship with a certain John Stratton Tearle?"

"I know him."

"You meet him constantly, and write to him when you both happen to be separated?"

"I see him frequently and sometimes write to him."

"He reserved a seat for you in a Pullman from New York yesterday, and accompanied you to the Pennsylvania Station?"

"Yes."

"Was John Stratton Tearle, by any chance, at Absecon, or Atlantic City, or anywhere in New Jersey, on the day you last saw your husband alive?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Are you not aware that he was supposed to be in Narragansett Pier at that period?"

"Yes. I believe so."

Forbes rustled his papers with the air of a man who was performing a profoundly disagreeable task; though, in reality, his chagrin arose from the witness' sudden liking for answers that were either monosyllables or their equivalents. She had spoken freely enough before, and he hoped she would keep on in the same vein. However, she had adopted the safer method of meeting a forensic attack; so he had to rest content.

WAS your husband acquainted with John Stratton Tearle?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Were they friends?"

"At one time."

"How long since?"

"Nearly six years ago."

"Come, now, Mrs. Kyrle, you were not so tongue tied a few minutes since. Can you not be more explicit?"

"What do you want me to say?" asked the witness, raising her eyes in a pathetic glance at the Coroner.

"My friend is hard to please," put in Traherne, taking what he fancied was meant as a cue to himself from his client. "At one time he declines to hear Mrs. Kyrle's explanations, and in the next breath he asks for them."

"I don't wish to press the witness to utter a word more than she wishes," said Forbes.

"But where is this testimony leading us? How does it concern the death of Mr. Kyrle? Is the New York District Attorney endeavoring to establish a conspiracy to bring about this poor man's death, and are his wife, Claude G. Waverton, this John Stratton Tearle, and possibly several other people, looked on as parties to it?"

"If you raise any serious objection to the line I am following, I am quite prepared to leave the inquiry where it stands—at present," said Forbes blandly.

But Traherne was too old a bird to be caught with that sort of legal chaff. He laughed. "Really, we New Jersey people are not quite so slow witted as the District Attorney evidently believes us to be," he cried, confident that this jibe at a New Yorker would tickle his audience. "I am not endeavoring to hamper inquiry,—indeed, my client welcomes it,—but it is one thing to elicit the truth concerning a distressing fatality, and quite another to embark on a fishing expedition. Ask what you please, Mr. Forbes, and you will be answered; but you must not expect Mrs. Kyrle to provide you with material for what practically amounts to a cross examination."

Forbes nodded. He was more at home in this sort of sparring than in forcing unpalatable revelations from a pretty woman. "Since your lawyer thinks I ought to speak plainly, Mrs. Kyrle, I shall do so," he said. "I believe you met John Stratton Tearle in Paris before you married Mr. Kyrle?"

"Yes," and the witness's tones were stronger now.

"Did your friendship with him provide the first cause of the quarrel between your husband and yourself?"

"Yes."

"Is it correct to say that Tearle introduced Mr. Waverton to you?"

"Yes."

"Very well. That ends this branch of the affair for the time being. Now will you tell us why you got Mr. Waverton to buy crystals of nicotine at a Palm Beach drugstore?"

"My husband wrote and asked me to procure the poison. He said that in New Jersey a layman could not obtain such a quantity without great difficulty, whereas the regulations in Florida were not so strict."

"Did he say why he wanted the drug?"

"As nearly as I can recollect, he was engaged in investigating the vegetable poison used by the obi men of the West Indies, and needed the nicotine to conduct certain experiments."

"How did you forward it to him?"

"By mail."

"And did Mr. Claude G. Waverton bring it to you in person?"

"Unquestionably. He laughed about it, and told me to retain my husband's letter, because it was a rather strange commission."

"Have you that letter?"

"I believe so. Had I known that all this—all this dreadful exposé would be made today, I should have searched for it."

FOR some reason best known to himself, Forbes concluded his examination at a moment when the court's sympathies were veering back to a woman who might have sinned, but was certainly being prosecuted by Fate.

The Coroner was evidently swayed by some such sentiment, since he asked, very gently, if the witness could suggest any motive for her husband's peculiar stipulations as to her movements on the fatal Tuesday.

"I hope it is not a cruel thing to say, but I am beginning to fear that he meant to kill himself that night, and was contriving matters in such a way that suspicion would be cast on me."

Mrs. Delamar had soon recovered from the emotion that shook her utterance in responding to Forbes' concluding question, and she put forward a theory that was at least reasonable, in a voice that was firm, if not slightly metallic.

"No secret was made of the purchase of the poison?" went on the Coroner.

"None whatever."

"Did Mr. Waverton know your husband?"

"To the best of my belief, he had never seen him. I don't think he even knew his name."

"Then Mr. Waverton could have no strong motive for concealing his share in the transaction at Palm Beach—about the poison, I mean?"

"I can imagine none."

"Will you endeavor to find the letter your husband wrote prior to February 22?"

"Certainly."

The Coroner thanked Mrs. Kyrle for the way in which she had given her testimony, and she descended from the witness stand.

JUST then Waverton and Clancy were engaged in what might be described as an ocular duel. Each man knew that the whole scene in court had been arranged with the skill of a dramatist. Waverton had been deliberately led to believe that the police attached the most grave significance to the buying of the poison; whereas the incident, though important, was now whittled down to a mere link in a chain of evidence that pointed to the suicide of Kyrle. Hence, the disquieting testimony given by José Vuilmo had been meant as a bait for Waverton, and he had swallowed

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